

VZCZCXR08605

OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM

DE RUEHBK #2260/01 2470847

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

O 040847Z SEP 09

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8170

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1882

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7427

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5753

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9933

RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6944

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002260

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV TH

SUBJECT: PRIVY COUNCIL MEMBERS, PALACE OFFICIAL QUASH

THAKSIN PARDON SUGGESTIONS PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY

REF: A. BANGKOK 2167 (KING WARNS OF RUIN)

1B. 08 BANGKOK 2243 (THAKSIN PREDICTS PARDON)

BANGKOK 00002260 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Privy Council Members and a palace official publicly and privately September 2-3 have dampened speculation about the potential for any pardon or "deal" for fugitive former PM Thaksin Shinawatra. The Thai media widely reported the September 2 comments of Privy Councilor Ampol Senanarong to a civil servant commission that Thaksin did not exhibit the qualities of a virtuous leader, and fugitives from justice could not file a petition seeking royal pardon. Privately, deputy Personal Private Secretary Krit Garnjana-Goonchorn and Privy Councilor GEN Pichit Kullavanijaya told us September 3, at a lunch at the Ambassador's residence held in honor of Privy Council Chair GEN Prem Tinsulanonda, that while Thaksin was sending out continuous feelers to palace personnel, there was no chance for Thaksin to cut a deal and return to Thailand a free man. Meanwhile, former Deputy Prime Minister and close Thaksin ally Sompong Amornvivat told us that while Thaksin continued to profess optimism about an "imminent return," Sompong personally did not see any viable channels through which this might occur.

12. (C) Comment: While Thaksin himself told the Ambassador in July 2008 that he expected a deal could be cut that would lead to a pardon for him and a national unity government (ref B), much water has passed under the bridge in the intervening year plus to undermine his hopes and assumptions. Of most note are his October 2008 conviction and his April 2009 call for "revolution" during the height of the red-shirt rallies that degenerated into mob riots in Pattaya and Bangkok. Recent rumors about the renewed possibility of a pardon deal seem sourced to red shirts or Thaksin associates; few give credence to talk of a Democrat-Puea Thai alternate coalition, apart from being rhetorical pressure for Phumjai Thai to fall in line. While it is understandable why Thaksin would hope to cut a deal for a royal pardon, it is less clear why anyone associated with the Palace would support such a gambit just months after Thaksin openly called for revolution. Privy Councilors and other officials in direct service to the King appear to see Thaksin as an existential threat to the monarchy, an institution they have devoted their lives to

serving and protecting. When asked whether Thaksin would ever return to Thailand, GEN Pichit quipped: "Eventually, but most likely in a coffin." End Summary and Comment.

All the King's (Old) Men - a brief primer

---

¶ 13. (C) The 19 elderly men who comprise the Privy Council have few formal duties apart from advising Thai King Bhumibol when he seeks advice, and playing a critical role during succession, which has not been an issue in Thailand for the past 62 years. Five are former Supreme Court Chief Justices, with a sixth a life-long judge who served as PM; seven are former flag-ranked officers; and the remaining six are five career civil servants and one head of a state-owned enterprise, many with an engineering bent. Having sworn personal oaths to serve the King as public servants throughout their working careers through age 60, they have devoted their retirement years to being his personal advisers. While highly esteemed in society, the Privy Councilors generally shy away from politically-related commentary in public.

¶ 14. (C) The Privy Council is separate from, but affiliated with, the Office of the Principal Private Secretary (PPS), which is headed by two former Ambassadors to the U.S., PPS Arsa Sarasin and DPPS Krit, and responsible for correspondence/paperwork for the King. Financial management is handled by a different entity, the Office of the Royal Household, along with two more separate entities, the Crown Property Bureau and the Privy Purse. For the past decade, King Bhumibol has spent nearly all of his time three hours away from Bangkok, in his seaside Hua Hin palace. The Bangkok-based Privy Councilors have relatively infrequent

BANGKOK 00002260 002.2 OF 003

interaction with the King at this point, PPS Arsa even less so.

Publicly: Thaksin not a just leader, not worthy of pardon

---

¶ 15. (C) Three Privy Councilors have broken the soft taboo against speaking publicly on politically-related issues in recent years to speak out publicly against fugitive former PM Thaksin. Privy Council Chair GEN Prem is the most notable, and has drawn the wrath of red-shirt demonstrators, who rioted in front of his residence in May 2007 and demonstrated there again in April 2009. West Point grad GEN Pichit has several times over the past year accused Thaksin of massive money laundering through the Cayman Islands. On September 2, a lesser known Privy Councilor, Ampol Senanarong, a life-long Agriculture Ministry irrigation expert, waded into the anti-Thaksin fray, at a time when rumors of alleged possible Democrat-Puea Thai "grand coalition" arrangements and/or a pardon for Thaksin were on the rise.

¶ 16. (SBU) Speaking on morals, ethics, and transparency at a seminar held at the Civil Servant Commission, Ampol directly addressed the issue of whether Thaksin were worthy of or eligible for a pardon. Citing the "dasavidha- rajadhaama," or ten principles of a righteous ruler, Ampol contrasted the King's virtuous behavior with Thaksin's misrule as Prime Minister, claiming Thaksin exhibited none of the ten virtues.

Ampol, who attended King Bhumibol's two most recent audiences, including the August 21 one in which the King called for unity to prevent the country from falling into ruin (ref A), stated flatly that Thaksin was ineligible for a pardon. Ampol cited three examples, without naming the individuals involved, of convicts who had fled instead of serving their jail terms, and whose pardon requests were denied by the King on these grounds.

Privately - reinforcing the sense no deal is likely

---

¶6. (SBU) Ambassador held a September 3 lunch at the Residence in honor of GEN Prem, who turned 89 on August 26. Six Privy Councilors (Prem, GEN Surayud, ACM Sitthi, GEN Pichit, Sawad Wattanayagorn, and Atthaniti Disatha-amnaj), plus the King's PPS Arsa Sarasin and the Deputy PPS, Ambassador Krit, attended.

¶7. (C) Ambassador Krit, who served as Prem's diplomatic liaison when Prem was PM from 1980-88 and was recalled from his Ambassadorial assignment in Washington early to assume the deputy PPS position in 2008, expressed regret that Ampol had spoken up so publicly September 2. He suggested that Prem had not authorized it and would have preferred not to stir further public controversy. Ampol had been present in King Bhumibol's two most recent public audiences, Krit noted, and inevitably people would infer Ampol was speaking on the King's behalf. However, Krit proceeded to be equally emphatic in ruling out any potential pardon or deal for Thaksin.

¶8. (C) Acknowledging that Thaksin had sent "continuous feelers" to various people associated with the palace over the past year, Krit stated forthrightly that: "Arsa had shut down all such known channels." Citing what he considered Thaksin's incendiary and irreverent comments in April 2009 in the Financial Times and elsewhere, Krit opined that a deal with Thaksin would be "unimaginable."

¶9. (C) GEN Pichit was equally blunt to us. Accusing Thaksin of attempting to undermine the institution of monarchy and return to Thailand to serve as "President," Pichit said: "we won't let him." When asked whether Thaksin had a chance of ever returning to Thailand, Pichit paused before adding: "Eventually, but most likely in a coffin" after dying abroad.

Thaksin - still hoping for an early return

---

¶10. (C) In a separate September 3 meeting, Thaksin ally and

BANGKOK 00002260 003.2 OF 003

former Deputy Prime Minister Sompong Amornvivat told us that Thaksin continued to express optimism about his prospects for an imminent return to Thailand. Sompong reported that he meets with Thaksin frequently in Dubai -- and will do so again in a few weeks -- and that Thaksin often ends their encounters by stating confidently: "I will see you in Bangkok soon." When we asked whether this confidence was well founded, Sompong said that he was not aware of any mechanism by which Thaksin could return to Bangkok any time soon, before adding that he personally did not share Thaksin's optimism.

JOHN